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ABSTRACT

In both France and the United States, restaurants remain the hotel and catering sector's main employer. In France, 25% of hotel and catering personnel are self-employers versus fewer than 5% in the United States; however, the growth of hotel and restaurant chains in France may eventually limit opportunities for creating an independent activity. The French hotel and catering industry is characterized by high turnover and a largely young, unskilled work force. High-level jobs are increasingly reserved for those with specialized diplomas in fields such as business and management. The situation in the United States is similar. With the exception of gourmet cooking, the traditional activities of the sector in both countries remain fairly indifferent to high-level diplomas and privilege on-the-job training. However, hotel and restaurant chains have a great demand for higher education graduates. Although chains and large employers in the United States and France generally have a stronger union presence and often provide better employment conditions and possibilities of advancement, the French often consider working for chains socially degrading. In both France and the United States, employers are having difficulties recruiting young, low-skilled personnel to whom they can offer inferior employment conditions and few possibilities of career advancement. (MN)

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Employment Prospects in the Hotel and Catering Trade: A Franco-American Comparison

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Training & Employment

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM CEREQ AND ITS ASSOCIATED CENTRES

EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS IN THE HOTEL AND CATERING TRADE: A FRANCO-AMERICAN COMPARISON

Hotel and catering jobs offer considerable employment possibilities for a young labour force which, with little experience, often places its career hopes on specialised training. In fact, such jobs, which are so attractive to the young generation, are frequently found in structures less prestigious than the palaces or five-star restaurants of the candidates' dreams. In addition, they do not offer longer term career opportunities, in the form of a real employment or profession, to more than a tiny proportion of these young people. From this point of view, the United States, where a distinction is made between odd jobs, regular employment and professions within the hotel and catering trade, permits a prospective look at the activity in France.

Since the 1970s, France and the United States have carried out a veritable transfer of competences in the hotel and catering trade. France has exported its gastronomical expertise and received in return, not without a certain resistance, hotel and catering chains from which it has learned new management methods and a new approach to service in numbers. Today, the chains are improving their positions in both countries. The main growth expected in France is that of the fast-food outlets, but at the very time that these are slowing down in the United States in favour of restaurants offering table service at moderate prices.

France, which is still largely dominated by a tradition of self-run enterprises in the hotel and catering trade, will probably undergo an increase in the share of salaried jobs, especially in supervisory, management and marketing functions. The American advance in this area thus permits us to take a prospective look at employment, while recognising France's advance in the constitution of the different occupations and hotel management training.

RESTAURANTS AS THE SECTOR'S MAIN EMPLOYER

In France, the number of hotel and catering jobs is generally underestimated owing to the large number of canteens, which are run by private and especially public operators. Indeed, France is the European leader in the field, with 40 percent of the turnover for food consumed outside the home, but this sector, known as 'institutional food service', is not very visible in statistical breakdowns since it is generally classified not with the hotel and catering sector but with hospital, school, prison, military and other activities.

If institutional food service is reintegrated into the hotel and catering industry, the profession represents nearly one million jobs. More than one-third are found in restaurants, including three-quarters in 'traditional-style restaurants' and one-quarter in 'fast food'. One-third of these jobs are carried out in canteens and only one-fifth in hotels or other accommodations (cf. Graphic p. 2).

In the United States, the same statistical operation leads to an estimate of nearly ten million hotel and catering jobs. Three-fourths are found in restaurants, where table service is less widespread than in France, with the result that such jobs are evenly divided between what are defined as 'full-service restaurants' and 'limited-service eating places'. Canteens, moreover, account for only a small proportion of the jobs (cf. Graphic below) and 13 percent of the turnover for meals eaten outside the home. Indeed, only one-tenth of companies with more than one hundred full-time employees offer eating facilities to their personnel, and the other canteens often provide only a basic service to a needy population, notably elderly persons and school children identified as undernourished. The hotel trade, meanwhile, which is much less developped than catering, offers even fewer employment opportunities than in France: proportionally, the United States has 2.6 times fewer hotels (and 1.5 times more restaurants) than France. On the other hand, going to restaurants is more widespread among Americans, who eat an average of one out of every five meals outside their homes, which is nearly twice as often as the French.

In France, 25 percent of hotel and catering personnel are self-employed, compared to fewer than 5 percent in the United States. Catering remains largely perceived as an opportunity open to all age groups, without significant capital and without diploma requirements. Anyone can open a restaurant, as in the United States, where only some states require a basic training course in hygiene. The growth of hotel and restaurant chains in France is gradually extending salaried work, however, and may thus come to limit the opportunities for creating an independent activity.

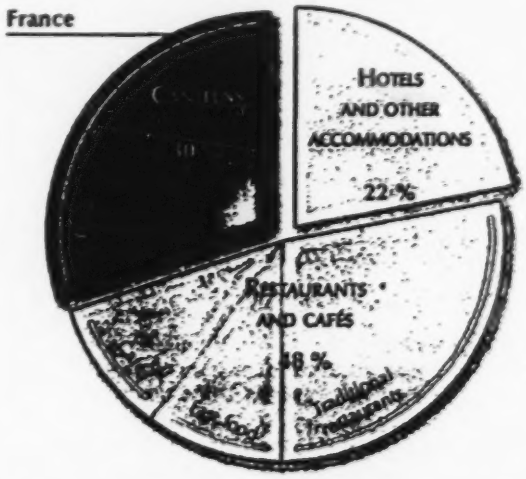
AN INDUSTRY SEGMENTED BETWEEN PROFESSIONS, REGULAR EMPLOYMENT AND ODD JOBS

The French hotel and catering industry is characterised by a high turnover and a workforce that is largely young and unskilled. In this respect, it tends to take its inspiration from the American model, where a third of the population has worked in a restaurant at one time or another. It is mainly composed of operating personnel who are often in contact with customers and thus essentially recruited on the basis of behaviour assessment.

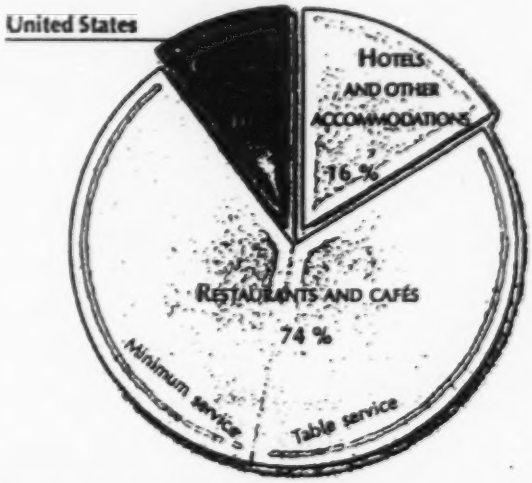
In the hotel industry, the majority of jobs involve cleaning, sometimes delegated to specialised companies, and personal services such as hostess-desk clerk, porter, doorman or bell captain. It is possible to arrive at supervisory or managerial posts through internal promotion, but high-level jobs are increasingly reserved for those with specialised diplomas in business, accounting, management, company strategy and so on. The career prospects for operating personnel are thus often limited, especially in reception-desk functions, where the hotel trade is above all a sector for initial labour-market entry before professional reorientation.

Catering is also a two-tiered sector. The cooks, however, notwithstanding their subordinate role, often have real possibilities for advancement. It is true that cooking is still largely the work of skilled personnel, with diplomas or experience, unlike table service and the bottom-level hotel jobs, which involve a personnel that is often very young (under 25), unspecialised and employed on a part-time basis.

HOTEL AND CATERING JOBS IN FRANCE AND THE UNITED STATES



Sources: INSEE annual business survey, 1998 (hotels, restaurants, cafés); Gira-Sic, 1997 (canteens).



Sources: Bureau of National Statistics, 1997 (hotels, restaurants); National Restaurant Association, 1998 (canteens).

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The Americans, meanwhile, long counted the hotel industry, as an essentially non-specialised activity, within the cleaning and personal services sector, while 'food services' were attached to retail trade. Since 1997, hotel and catering activities are included in the same service sector, under the heading 'accommodation and food services'. This change is more indicative of a concern for harmonising international statistics sources than a real linking of the two trades. Nonetheless, the management of the workforce in hotel and catering activities is fairly close to that practised in France: apart from supervisory personnel, generally holding diplomas and employed full time, only competences in culinary production are really recognised. American employers even tend to maintain a three-tiered management of operating personnel.

Two distinct populations occupy the subordinate posts: on the one hand, a considerable student population in need of work to help pay for costly studies, generally in contact with customers and employed on a part-time, hourly basis, and, on the other hand, a population essentially consisting of minority groups who hold the less prestigious full-time jobs such as cleaning or caretaking in the hotels or dishwashing, basic cooking or baking in food services.

Only major hotels and gourmet restaurants seek personnel with a good level of general training for jobs as waiters or other service posts, while insisting that this personnel is 'educated but not skilled' in relation to the job held. They also require their cooks, whose expertise is recognised, to have a specialised diploma.

The occupation of cook is nonetheless becoming more commonplace in the United States. The restaurant chains in particular, whose menus are often developped around a single theme, can rely on standardised work which permits the rapid learning of limited techniques. Thus, the proportion of jobs for short-order or fast-food cooks is sharply increasing and now equals that of traditional cooks.

This category-based management of the workforce reflects the coexistence of different kinds of jobs:

- about one-fifth treated as skilled professions and centred on culinary production;
- one-fourth full-time jobs, including the subordinate positions that basically involve minorities;
- a majority of odd jobs for students, more numerous in restaurants than hotels.

If the spread of odd jobs still seems unlikely in France because of the relatively small number of students who work, the downgrading of certain jobs relating to the profession of cook and their opening to unskilled labour is underway, notably among large employers in urban areas.

TWO SYSTEMS OF TRAINING FOR A SINGLE EMPLOYMENT STRUCTURE?

French hotel training, mainly taking its inspiration from the luxury hotels, grew out of a large number of specialities basically intended to satisfy a prestigious, independent hotel and catering trade. Over the past thirty years, it has been restructured around basic specialisations: cooking, table service and hotel management. Recently, moreover, its level has been improved to meet the management needs of hotel chains and catering companies providing a service that is often standardised but more diversified in terms of the range of chains, and thus reaching a larger clientele. Hotel education remains dominated by an artistic ideal, however–and this is the case as of the initial levels of vocational training, which begin around the age of fifteen (*certificat d'aptitudes professionnelles* [vocational aptitude certificate, CAP] and *brevet d'études professionnelles* [vocational studies certificate, BEP])–which may explain the frequent dissatisfactions of cooks when they actually enter the labour market.

At present, France and the United States have the same proportion of high school graduates: 62 percent of a given age group. But the American educational system is more orientated to the recognition of higher-education diplomas. In the hotel and catering trade in the United States, there is no real professional recognition for low-level operational specialities such as cleaning, service or assembly cookery (which consists of carrying out simple food preparations on the basis of semi-prepared products from the food-processing industry). Specialisations come into play after the first two or four years of higher education and are thus more limited: they deal only with culinary arts and hotel management. They are generally recognised in terms of job status–with more full-time posts and more attractive wages–and better career prospects. Certain hotel schools subsequently propose narrower specialisations in management, distinguishing, for example, independent hotel management from that of chains or restaurant management from that of canteens, while these options do not yet exist in France.

These two educational systems correspond, however, to a comparable employment structure in both countries. With the exception of gourmet cooking, the traditional activity in the sector remains fairly indifferent to high-level diplomas and privileges on-the-job training. On the other hand, the hotel and restaurant chains have a great demand for higher-education graduates. Such chains are, moreover, more widespread in the United States, where they represent 27 percent of the restaurants and 20 percent of the hotels and employ half of the industry's employees. In France, fewer than 4 percent of the restaurants and only 7 percent of the hotels belong to chains. The essential part of the restaurants' activity is thus still carried out in an artisanal context, within SMEs. Only the canteens generally belong to very large structures, with several thousand salaried employees each.

In both countries, chains and large employers generally have a stronger union presence and often provide better employment conditions, with possibilities of advancement to supervisory and management posts. In France, however, independent of these advantages, working for chains which offer such run-of-the-mill services is viewed as so socially degrading and technically deskilling that they often have difficulties in recruiting professional cooks.

Attached to the image of gourmet cooking, French professionals are less sensitive to objective working conditions than to the socially prestigious nature of the services provided. In a trade that counts above all on its artisanal features and the personal involvement of individuals, the orientation towards canteens or hotel and restaurant chains tends to be seen as a 'comfortable' choice–but also one that cannot be reversed. On the other side of the Atlantic, it is simply seen as a passing chance in the context of constant professional mobility.

In the United States, the economic recovery of the late 1990s saw the average unemployment rate fall to around 4 percent, as compared to 9.6 percent in France (August 2000). Sometimes confronted with a shortage of labour, American employers have lowered their demands for qualifications. They turn, for example, to retired or unemployed individuals seeking work to compensate for inadequate income and also employ large numbers of young people (one-fourth of the employees in the American hotel and catering industry are under twenty years old). This phenomenon remains quite limited in France, where only 10 percent of the 15-19 age group works, as compared to 50 percent in the United States. It is thus not certain that France's hotel and catering trade will follow the same evolution as that of the United States, which provides odd jobs to students, low-skilled employment to a needy labour force and a few professions with real prospects for career advancement.

Nonetheless, in France as well the profession seems to be having difficulties recruiting young, low-skilled personnel, to whom it often offers inferior employment conditions and few possibilities for career advancement. In the face of a labour force which is less 'flexible' than in the United States, it would seem to be lacking in attractiveness and, above all, to have difficulties in keeping its employees. It does not always give clear indications to young people about the content of hotel and catering jobs and their middle-term prospects and has yet to adopt less irregular working hours or offer better recognition of experience in the trade and employees' involvement in their work. From the educational system onwards, this sector is too often described as a prestigious artisanal and artistic activity rather than as an efficient commercial activity serving a broad public.

Sylvie-Anne Mériot (Céreq)

The Hotel and Catering Industry, an International Comparison

This article is based on an initial study carried out by Céreq in 1997 and 1998 in the context of a reform of hotel and catering diplomas. The data on the United States were obtained through additional research carried out for the French Ministry of Tourism, under the direction of Professor Jean Gadrey of the University of Lille 1 (Clersé-CNRS). This project involved an analysis of employment determinants and prospects in the hotel, restaurant and café sector in France, including an international comparison with the United States and Japan. A joint report was issued in November 2000 and a formal publication will follow in 2001.

Further Reading

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• Florence Jany-Catrice. "Niveau et qualité des emplois dans l'hôtellerie et la restauration américaines : comparaison avec la France" [Level and Quality of Jobs in the American Hotel and Catering Industry: A Comparison with France.] *Formation Emploi* no. 71 (July-September 2000).

• Sylvie-Anne Mériot. *La restauration collective. Analyse des besoins de formation pour une rénovation des diplômes.* [Institutional Food Service. Analysis of Training Needs for Reforming Diplomas.] Document no. 129, "Evaluation" series. Marseilles: Céreq, 1998.

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